

How to Get a Job in Growth Marketing feat. WillowTree's Billie Loewen

Billie Loewen [00:00:03] Hi, everybody. Welcome back to another episode of Room for Growth. Today you have just me, Billie Loewen. Billy Fischer will be here for our next episode. Today by request, we are going to talk about what a career in growth marketing can look like, how to get into growth marketing, some of the skills that we look for when we are hiring, in particular, as well as how different marketers can start to transition into a more product-specific growth, as well as whole picture lifecycle marketing plus product experience role to understand that UX/UI and otherwise transformative experience.

Billie Loewen [00:00:40] So at a baseline, when we are hiring folks to be in roles for either helping companies with their strategy for product growth, they might be building out a channel messaging experience that is automated and personalized in a way that is intended to drive an increase in lifetime value for different types of customers, we think about a number of different skills that we want to see at a most basic level. So for a more junior person, we want to see that at a minimum they have a few years of experience in marketing, but it can be pretty broadly based. I actually love hiring out of nonprofit because I think that people who have a holistic experience, where they might be part of a web strategy, or they might be part of direct mail, or they might be part of digital advertising, generally in a background where they have a crossover of skills and they understand how a web experience or an app experience correlates to a channel messaging experience, or to an outside channel marketing experience, maybe like an in-person event or something.... They have felt responsible for creating cohesion between those touchpoints. That's a really great experience because generally, I think good growth marketing implies that you understand how to take every touchpoint that somebody might have with a brand and help all of those touchpoints feel cohesive, feel like they belong to the same brand, and feel very intelligent to who the user is. They're speaking to you. So I always love those folks who have a more broad-based background where they have worn many hats. They've done many things.

Billie Loewen [00:02:03] I actually encourage a lot of young people right out of college, if you see a nonprofit that needs help, and they will give you a role where you can have a lot of impact and you trust your skills and your ability to do that, that can be a great place to start. That was where I started as well. I saw a nonprofit and I was interested in the cause of it. It gave me an opportunity to travel and I looked at their website and I thought, "Oh, I know that I can make this experience quite a bit better." That ended up being super impactful for me in that I learned a lot along the way as well. That's where I developed some of the early business skills around cohort measurement and just CRM generally that I have. So that's a great, great idea if you're a college grad looking for a landing place.

Billie Loewen [00:02:44] Another place is always agency. I think agency life trains up employees in a different way. You have to become really empathetic to clients and their needs. You have to learn how to sort of solve problems and have ideas for clients and take on problems on a consistent basis. And then of course, the industry experience that an agency is going to give you to work across different sectors is really valuable when you start to think about how to break down a business and how they make money and where revenue comes from, and how you can change behavior to do that. So an agency is always a good stopping point. But generally what I look for is just somebody who has some background in marketing. The general specifics of growth are relatively easy to train. There's a lot of great curriculum out there that can help you brush up on growth-specific frameworks. Reforge is of course one of the most popular. It is a little bit expensive, but there are scholarships and there's, I know at WillowTree we sponsor people who want to take that curriculum because it's great. It talks about things like flywheels. So just what are the different components of an experience that work together to help drive growth? It helps you understand how to order, how to measure different audience segmentation in terms of their cohort value and LTV, as well as how to drive those things up. And then the basics of measurement.

Billie Loewen [00:04:02] I think when you're getting into growth, one of the things that will become especially clear is that some technical skills and some technical prowess are going to be really important. So does that comfort learning new software, learning new skills, potentially learning some HTML or some sequel become really relevant skills, particularly when you're querying data and trying to understand data, but also just some basic analytics, some understanding of how to

look at trends over time and understand what's happening and answer questions and bring insights out of that data. It doesn't have to be the 300 level. You don't have to be a data scientist to be good at this. But you do have to understand when you see a change in data around conversion, for instance, do you have the skills to answer, "Well, what happened? What caused this? Why did this occur? And can I answer that pretty specifically?" So again, tons of courses on basic analytics out there.

Billie Loewen [00:04:55] I think even some basic math skills is a good one. You can do a lot of free math courses on things like Khan Academy. So many marketers, it's surprising, get really nervous when we say they need basic math. But don't be intimidated by math. I understand a lot of marketing folks come from creative backgrounds or communications backgrounds where that wasn't a skill that was critical, but just starting to brush up — even if you're not going to take the GMAT, you don't want to go to business school, maybe get the study materials for the GMAT and start to learn some of those skills and some of that language in math because it's really applicable to what you do every day. So that's another good piece of advice. Of course, folks who have an MBA, that's always a great skill, but there's a lot of ways that you can replicate a business degree. Really, what an MBA teaches you is how do the different components of a business work together to create the whole? So it gives a really big sense of how to look at things like a balance sheet, and understand what a company might be investing in, or what sorts of assets they have that you could potentially leverage to drive growth, or where they might be investing in the future — that helps understand what might be an acceptable cost per acquisition for an individual user versus how much potential revenue you need to derive from that user.

Billie Loewen [00:06:11] Some of those basic math figures are really helpful when you're thinking about, "How do I move the needle from X to Y with a single individual user?" Or, "what sorts of value propositions in this company could I potentially leverage to draw affinity through the messages that we're putting out to people?" "What is going to be their tolerance or their comfort to invest in different types of user experiences?" Whether it be through automation or through different types of personalization and so on. And so that's just some of the basis and some of the starting places. I especially talked about what I think intimidates people, which is math and analytics for folks who don't have a background in marketing. And I think it's really critical. It's a must-have for a place in growth and then beyond that, it gets really sort of channel-specific and product development-specific.

Billie Loewen [00:07:01] So if you already have the 100-level and the 200-level in marketing experience where maybe you've worked in channel for a while, you've worked in paid media or you've worked in lifecycle marketing or you've worked in global brand, you've built campaigns, etc., and you're trying to round out your more holistic experience so that you can bring a real authority to how you guide the build out of a product experience and how that relates to what messaging experience, there are a few really common things that we use all the time at WillowTree that you can Google. There are tons of courses out there. There are a lot of white papers on how to do this. There are tons of examples of what this looks like. So the first is, is journey mapping. We use journey mapping all the time. We're basically from the time that an individual consumer learns about your brand all the way through the point in time where they become the most valuable to you in their lifetime. That might be after one purchase, it might be after 35 purchases, it might be after they sign up for a subscription, etc. Just track that journey. What are all of the different behaviors that you'd want to see that user exhibit? And then the product experience on top of that generally helps draw out what are the jobs to be done, what are a user's needs at any given point in time in their day, or when they're using this individual product. And then same with channel messaging. You can go back through your journey map and better understand what opportunities do we have to speak to this user? At what point in time which behaviors will they exhibit that we want to kind of have a conversation with them. That's a really easy way to think about adding a channel messaging strategy on top of a digital product experience and how to create those experiences cohesively.

Billie Loewen [00:08:42] We use the jobs to be done in frameworks very consistently. Again, this is something that is easy to Google. There will be lots of examples of it. It is not rocket science. It's really simple at its core, but sometimes the most simple things, which are, let's just define what tasks somebody is trying to accomplish when they use our product and how do we build an entire channel messaging experience and a product experience around those needs? Pretty basic,

pretty important. If you've never written a use case for channel messaging or for a product feature, that's a great thing to Google. Learning how to just write good use cases, right? Holistic use cases are something that we do every day. And then we also use the basics of A/B testing frequently. So creating a hypothesis that says if we do X, we think behaviors will respond in Y way and it will drive Z in lift is an important place to get comfortable. So learning the best practices of testing and what a minimum viable population for that test might be, how to run it, how much time it takes to get statistically significant data out of your testing ecosystem. Again, the thing where you can learn it online, you can Google it, you can find lots of courses, there will be lots of free materials. It's all super important.

Billie Loewen [00:10:02] And then of course, we care a lot about the best practices for channel. So email, push, in-app messaging, SMS, all have really different best practices, really different use cases and reasons why you should use those channels. I expect anybody coming into growth will understand those channels well. Then, you put those skills together. You take a basic understanding of what good UX is for product, add good channel messaging in an automated way to it. Think about how audience segmentation works and how you measure different cohorts, build dashboards that measure those things and then start to do A/B testing to improve experiences over time. That's an elementary view of what we do in growth every day. But those feel like the fairly basic elements. Bonus points if you can put a big dose of creativity on top of it and you are good at writing like actual good copy. But again, we have folks who lean into all of those different talents and skills and develop in different ways. You need these cross-functional teams. You need teams of really thoughtful specialists, people who are great at SEO and understand how to drive traffic through SEO and through the optimization of different types of keywords they're using. You also need people who are hyper-creative, you need designers, and you need people who are great visual artists to ultimately make experiences as impactful as possible. So it's not a one-size-fits-all track. There are lots of different spaces for people in the growth world, but those are good starting blocks.

Billie Loewen [00:11:28] Those are good basics of where to begin to get these jobs. For anybody who's interviewing for a growth role and wondering how to get a job at a product company or an agency that specializes in growth or marketing. They're a few things that I always look for. One, again, is that willingness to wear many hats. I think today there's a lot of emphasis from candidates on trying to understand what will be my job responsibilities, will I be paid commensurate to those responsibilities? What exactly will they be? And I understand that mindset. I understand really wanting to understand what's the scope of problem-solving that you're going to be asked to accomplish. But I love when a candidate comes in and they're just hungry to solve problems. They're hungry to have their fingerprint of control on what they're doing. They want to have a lot of ownership and autonomy over projects and the outcome of projects. I think that mindset always shines to me in an interview when I really believe a person wants to come in, they want to do their best work, they want to drive impact. They understand how to do that and how they'll measure it. And I believe their hard skills, but I also just love the mentality of, "Yeah, I can come up with campaign ideas, I can make suggestions about a product's UX and I can make sure that I take the garbage out on the way out of the office," because that makes all of us happier and healthier. I think that humility stands out.

Billie Loewen [00:12:47] I love people who can talk about problems that they've solved and done so successfully. I do think there are times with marketers where it's totally okay to fail, and failure is a big part of marketing. Not every campaign works, but sometimes when I have candidates who talk about campaigns that fail and then they don't tell me what they learned and applied and did in the next campaign to make it successful, I really need to see candidates who can say, "I did X and Y and it drove this impact." So if you have never had to get down to the nitty gritty of metrics-based impact on the work that you've done, either because you led some kind of software implementation and it had some kind of output at the end that made the business more efficient or made you more effective at sending campaigns at volume, or you've launched campaigns and then measured the results. You really have to push yourself to understand what was the overall impact. It can be a little bit ballpark, it can be a little bit back-of-napkin math if you have to do that and you're clear about it. But I want people who are comfortable making those equations and being able to talk about what they've done in numbers. So that business acumen just sort of has to be at a baseline in place.

Billie Loewen [00:13:57] And then three: people who are comfortable learning new things, who are comfortable saying, "Yeah, I may not have ever done a CRM implementation or a data migration and I don't perfectly know how to do this, but I know that I can find the answers and I know that I can lean on people around me who have done it and I can be successful at leading a project even if I've never done it before." So people who are a little willing to jump into the deep end, I think those are three potentially good areas and skill-sets to emphasize in an interview process, because all of those problem-solving skills are going to be really important in a growth role.

Billie Loewen [00:14:30] If you are an executive and you are trying to hire an agency whose really good at growth and you're trying to weed out different candidates, there are a few things to consider asking. One might be how large is their marketing team, first and foremost, and what's the mix of skills there? You generally are going to want to find an agency who can support you soup-to-nuts and any kind of problem solving that you need. So I always want to make sure that within the marketing team themselves, they have a broad mix of skill-sets across media, SEO, lifecycle messaging, as well as design and content, so that if you're ever in a place where you need just extra eyes helping in any element of campaign production or messaging or measurement, they've got a broad bench of folks who can potentially play into that — as well as diversity in marketing today.

[00:15:22] If you are looking for an agency and they are not being really intentional about hiring the most diverse set of voices they can possibly find, it's probably going to get you in hot water at some point. You really need more eyes on these campaigns and more people in a psychologically safe way able to say, "Yeah, that's a good idea and it's going to resonate." Or, "Whoa, that is going to miss the mark." And sure, not every campaign is going to be perfect, but having that sense of internal dialogue happening around what is or isn't a good campaign for different audiences, that should be something that's really important. And I've seen a lot of brands and a lot of agencies get in trouble because they just don't totally understand who they're talking to and really and truly, one good voice on a team representing your consumer can be enough as long as they feel empowered to speak up. So there's that component, too: what's their depth of analytical experience? I know it's kind of hard sometimes to understand, "Are you guys skill level one or skill level five?" But ask them how many people have SQL skills, ask them what sorts of tools they have, experience building dashboards and what are their preferences for different types of tools. When they get the choice, what do they think are the best tools to drive impact and understand? How many analysts do they have? What's their cadence for reporting insights? How often should a brand expect to be getting some baseline performance metrics versus actual recommendations coming from deeper insights? If your growth agency isn't willing to give you recommendations on a consistent basis and performance right now on a really consistent basis, that's a problem. You want to see an example of where they've done this before just in a weekly or monthly with an individual client.

Billie Loewen [00:17:03] And then one of the most important pieces is what is their technical skill set. The reality of marketing today and of growth today is that when something is broken, whether your data is inaccurate or an audience segment isn't firing through your various systems or your data is disconnected or it's slow, or you need a campaign that can do big thing X and Y. And it's a fun and it's an exciting idea, but it requires geolocation coming together with really advanced personalization, which requires a fairly advanced automated canvas. Technology is at the core of everything that we do. So not only do you need people who are comfortable in the tech, but you need people who can solve problems when they come up. So I would always ask, what is your engineering bench look like? What types of problems could we run into that you could solve? For me, if we need things to get unblocked in a really technical sense, that's a nice thing about WillowTree as I always get to say, "Hey, by the way, we've got a team of about 70 marketers, and then on top of that we've got an entire design and content team. We've got a separate SEO team, we've got a whole crew of people who their bread and butter are insights." We put those people together on small teams and they're super powerful and, "Oh, by the way, just in case you need them, we've got 800 engineers, quite a bunch. You need an API build. You need fixes in your event taxonomy. You need to completely rework your UX experience. You need to think about identity resolution. It just goes on and on. You need to integrate two systems of data. We're going to be able to solve that problem for you. That should give our clients like a real comfort. There's not going to be a problem that just doesn't get solved.

Billie Loewen [00:18:43] So there you go. That is my wisdom for anybody who is looking for a new job in the New Year or setting their New Year's resolutions and thinking about how they might make some changes to how they're educating themselves in this realm or how they're looking for a job, how they're going to get fulfillment out of their career in the next year, just looking to pick up a more advanced skill-set and brush up on some of the basics. That's a little bit of my advice to you for job seekers out there. Hopefully the interview tips are helpful, not for anyone from WillowTree. I always tell my crews that once you get into WillowTree you are never allowed to leave because we love you way too much and need you to stay here with us. But for everyone else, please let us know if you are looking for a new job in growth. We would love to talk to you, would love to interview you, and otherwise, best of luck. We are rooting for you and hoping the best for you. Whether you're a brand, looking to do big things in marketing next year or an individual just looking to be at the top of your game. So have a wonderful week. We can't wait to see you back here on Room for Growth.